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An American in the EHESS

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An American in the EHESS

William Weber

- 1 There I was in a Heidelberg bar in 1988, putting a frothing glass of beer up to my lips, when a Cornell University music historian said: “I enjoyed reading about you in *Annales* a few days ago.” I was delighted to hear a musicologist cite *Annales : Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, since I had taken my degrees in history while working on musical topics. But I was taken aback to hear that I had been mentioned in that august journal. A recent issue included an article by Daniel Milo, a student at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), called “Le musical et le social : variations sur quatre textes de William Weber (Note critique)”.¹ Born in Israel and largely interested in literature, Daniel Milo became a student of Jacques Revel and contributed a chapter about origins of street names to Pierre Nora’s eminent book *Les lieux de mémoire*.² Jacques then invited me to speak at his seminar, and my paper was published in *Annales* in 1989.³ Daniel eventually turned back to literature, publishing such books as *Trahir le temps (histoire)*⁴ and *La dernière mort de Socrate*.⁵
- 2 That episode typified the critically important role Jacques Revel played in bringing scholars of different countries together at the EHESS, thereby stimulating thinking on a wide range of new subjects. The open-ended mood around the old building on Boulevard Raspail made it easy to meet other French scholars – indeed I remember encountering first Roger Chartier and a few days later Emmanuel Wallerstein while waiting in line in the cafeteria. Even though there existed no program for study of music at the EHESS, Jacques and his colleagues had strong musical interests and soon began developing a degree in the field. I encountered that interest while giving a paper at the EHESS’s *antenne* in Marseille, now called the Centre Norbert Elias, where I was introduced to Jean-Claude Passeron and music sociologist Emmanuel Pedler. Other eminent French historians were also welcoming; Daniel Roche encouraged my work to a particular extent, publishing an article of mine on musical life in eighteenth-century London in 2007 in the *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*.⁶
- 3 The EHESS provided a particularly enriching context within which American scholars encountered one another. Jane Fulcher had become a major figure in this context, working variously with Jacques Revel, Roger Chartier, and Pierre Bourdieu. Her first

book, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art*,⁷ came out in 1987, and a dozen years later she published *French Cultural Politics & Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War*.⁸ Controversy that arose over the latter volume opened up new lines of thinking about the intersection of politics and music.

- 4 Music sociology emerged as a major growing-point of scholars at the EHESS. I made friends with Pierre-Michel Menger, since his book of 1983 – *Le paradoxe du musicien : le compositeur, le mélomane et l'État dans la société contemporaine*⁹ – sparked my interest in the crisis of public taste for contemporary music, on which I had written for the *Harvard Crimson* and the *Los Angeles Times*. More recently visits to the EHESS have widened my acquaintance with sociologists of music – Olivier Roueff and Wenceslaus Lizé, who developed the *Synthèse de l'étude sur les publics du jazz en Bourgogne*.¹⁰ It was also a pleasure giving a paper to Stéphane Dorin's seminar, given his central position in the EHESS, after which I contributed to his book, *Déchiffrer les publics de la musique classique / Unraveling classical music audiences*.¹¹ It has been intriguing to see how these figures have been rethinking the Bourdieuean origins of music sociology, questioning hierarchical assumptions while opening up big databases for public musical activity and taste.
- 5 The degree programs in music at the EHESS have broadened the field of French musicology intellectually in important ways. Their close relationship with the social sciences has brought new interpretive tendencies of the sort followed in such countries as the U.S. and the U.K. It has been a pleasure watching Esteban Buch guide the program while writing major books on aspects of the careers of Beethoven and Schoenberg and then working with composer Sebastián Rivas to produce the opera *Aliados* about how Augusto Pinochet and Margaret Thatcher met to share memories in 1999. Esteban and his colleagues give seminars of great interest; I've most often dropped in the on "Musique et sciences sociales" he runs with Laure Schnapper, who published a book I like about the entrepreneurial activities of composer Henri Herz.¹² In May 2016 I was talking there about the problem of when writing that can be called music criticism developed in France in the eighteenth century – it was less the *philosophes* who did that than a conservative ex-Jesuit named Julien-Louis Geoffroy.

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William Weber, Professor of History Emeritus at California State University in Long Beach, has written *Music and the Middle Class* (revised ed. Ashgate, 2003), *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Clarendon Press, 1992), and *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). He edited *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1984) and *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700-1914* (Indiana University Press, 2004). He has been a member of doctoral committees in France, Finland and Canada as well as the United States and is an Associate of the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library at the University of California, Los Angeles.